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ABSTRACT

Basic questions concerning the purposes and functions of faculty evaluation in higher education are considered, along with background of the practice. It is contended that the purpose of faculty evaluation ought to be the improvement of instruction, and that the administrative uses of faculty evaluation for decisions of promotion, tenure, and salary increases should be secondary. Additional suggestions are as follows: faculty evaluation should focus on the teaching performance and not on the faculty member's scholarly reputation or productivity; faculty evaluation should be the responsibility of those administratively responsible for faculty performance; evaluation by students and colleagues has severe limitations if evaluation is to serve the improvement of instruction; evaluations should be conducted in a systematic, objective, valid, and fair manner; the results of faculty evaluation should be specified in advance and be acceptable to the faculty being evaluated; faculty evaluation must be tied to the institution's incentive-and-reward system; and evaluation should be supported by means of faculty development in the form of instructional resources that facilitate classroom instruction. Ethical and legal implications of faculty evaluation are also considered. (SW)

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. THE PURPOSE AND FUNCTIONS OF FACULTY EVALUATION

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IHE NEWSLETTER
June 1983
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THE PURPOSE AND FUNCTIONS OF FACULTY EVALUATION*

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The evaluation of teaching effectiveness has a nuance or two that suggests we could kill the goose that laid the golden eggs. The teaching faculties of the nation's colleges and universities are a remarkable array of scientists, scholars, specialists, and practitioners who – with little obvious preparation for their instructional chores – perform, for the most part, exceptionally well. Whatever our understanding of academic freedom might be, it usually concedes that the college curriculum is the faculty's responsibility – and it includes the corollary that faculty members should be free to choose their methods of instruction as teaching interests, teaching skills, and their respective academic disciplines might require. We have it on the authority of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching that the major field of study is a success story of which we can be justly proud. We have other evidence to suggest that the quality of graduate and professional education has never been higher. Why, then, such avid concern for evaluating what the faculties of our 3000 colleges do?

The evaluation of teaching faculty by students can be dated, with good reason, from the student protests of the 1960s. The student protests themselves can be dated from 1964, the year in which the first large number of the post-WWII generation appeared on college campuses. Whatever reason the students might have had for protesting, it surely had something to do with their massive number and the suspicion that colleges were ill-prepared to receive them. A failure of anticipation is thought by some demographers to be the life-story of the post-WWII generation. Hospitals were not ready for their delivery and baby cribs overflowed into hospital halls. Schools were not ready for them and their progression through the lower and upper grades was characterized by temporary classrooms, make-shift schedules, and/or ad hoc instructional arrangements. It is thus possible that they were indeed fed-up.

From the safety and presumed sanity of 1982 it is now possible to see in student protests neo-classic examples of displaced aggression, and it is easy to suspect that student evaluation techniques were but one of many administrative devices for defusing situations that were obviously explosive. Some of us believe that students never directed their righteous indignation to matters worthy of such; we suspect that their hostility found more random or symbolic targets than deserving ones; and we can still entertain the hypothesis that for the vast majority of students and institutions, it was the wrong revolution at the wrong time in the wrong place for all the wrong reasons.

If better instruction or more effective teaching was an outcome of student protests, there has been a noticeable failure to document the ways in which instruction has been improved and to specify how that improvement can be attributed to the events of 1964-1970. If student evaluations of college faculty have led to better methods of instruction or more effective learning in college classrooms, that too is an outcome lacking documentation. Counter-hypotheses that student evaluation has served best to produce grade-inflation and to give both faculty and administrators some much-needed protective coloration should not be dismissed without analysis for internal consistency and the collection of some empirical data.

Faculty evaluation can be seen, however, as stemming more directly from the financial

**With minor changes this paper was presented at a Conference on Evaluation of Teaching Effectiveness held at the Georgia Center for Continuing Education on September 8-9, 1982.*

crisis of the early 1970s; the changing job market for faculty members; faculty demands for tenure, promotion, and annual salary increments; a general disenchantment with education; and various other events or forces that come under the rubric of accountability. There are many suspicions that rapid growth and expansion of higher education in the 1960s were, in many ways, mis-managed. Faculty were often recruited hastily to meet overflowing classes, and neither the tempo nor the conditions of expansion permitted the kinds of socialization or acculturation that earlier generations of faculty had known. Calls for accountability found many sympathetic ears.

Despite the efforts of colleges and universities to establish sophisticated systems of faculty evaluation and accountability, there are some fundamental questions that have not been answered adequately. These questions, quite pointedly, are:

1. Why should we evaluate?
2. What should we evaluate?
3. Who should do the evaluating?
4. How should evaluation be conducted?
5. How should the results be used?

The answers to these questions are unlikely to be research or data based. Each is a question to be answered in light of our values and beliefs concerning education — and certain ethical and legal implications that are becoming increasingly evident. Published research should be consulted for such help as it can provide, but professional experience and judgment should receive the closest attention.

WHY EVALUATE?

The most justifiable reason for evaluating faculty is the improvement of instruction. Decisions concerning promotions, tenure, or salary increases should be informed by evaluation, but the use of student and collegial evaluations in such decisions should always be secondary. Research suggests that the role of evaluation in the "bread-and-butter" decisions of faculty life is minimal. The influence of student ratings is particularly difficult to document.

At least one of us would argue that unless faculty evaluations lead, in some definable manner, to the improvement of instruction, they do not serve the purpose they should serve. The most urgent need in higher education is not institutional viability, managerial effectiveness, or productive efficiency; it is better teaching and more effective learning.

Teaching and learning are dual processes that underlie all that we do in our 3000 colleges and universities. The two cannot be equated. Many students learn despite the inexcusably poor instruction they receive; some instructors teach well what students learn poorly. Faculty evaluations should not be based, therefore, on what or how well students learn. The predominant concern of faculty evaluation should be the improvement of the teaching that faculty do.

WHAT SHOULD BE EVALUATED?

The improvement of instruction is more likely to be an outcome of faculty evaluation if faculty are evaluated on the basis of their performance in the classroom. Distinctions should be made between faculty performance and faculty competence. Both performance and competence should be distinguished from professional reputation. Teaching should be fully recognized as a performing art or craft and it should be de-mystified by open definitions that teaching is what we do to help students learn.

Faculty competencies should be assessed at the time of appointment and in the assignment of faculty salaries, workloads, perquisites, and amenities. There are interesting interplays between reputation and performance, but reputation should not obscure the faculty member's assigned duties and responsibilities, observations or assessments of performance in carrying out those duties, and judgments concerning the effectiveness of performance.

What should not be evaluated as a means of improving instruction are faculty egos, their self-esteem, and their sense of personal worth. The evaluation of performance should

be de-personalized as much as possible.

WHO SHOULD EVALUATE?

A tenet of every faculty evaluation effort should be that evaluation is an administrative responsibility. Those administratively responsible for the performance of faculty and staff should evaluate the performance of faculty and staff. Those responsible for the administration of the institution should evaluate the performance of administrators. And finally, those who are accountable for the performance of the institution should evaluate the performance of presidents or chancellors.

As attractive as intra-collegial or inner-disciplinary forms of faculty evaluation might appear, it is doubtful that they serve current needs for evaluation. As popular as student evaluations of teaching faculty have been, it is possible that they have outlived their usefulness. In brief, the performance of teaching faculty should be evaluated by those administratively responsible for that performance – upon the advice of and consultation with colleagues and students, by all means – but without delegation of the responsibility itself.

HOW SHOULD EVALUATIONS BE CONDUCTED?

The methods chosen or developed for faculty evaluation should always meet certain standards of evaluation. In particular, the means should be systematic, objective, valid, and fair.

Faculty evaluation should be systematic in the sense that sufficient attention has been given to the development of a rationale by which faculty performance can be evaluated. The development of a climate or environment in which evaluation can take place may be as important as the development of any method, techniques, or procedure for evaluation. The point is that whatever faculty evaluation might be, it involves a process of development that should be systematic, well planned, and carefully implemented. No system of faculty evaluation can be borrowed or bought with expectations of overnight installation and immediate results.

Faculty evaluation should be objective in the sense that the observations, inferences, and judgments by which faculty are evaluated permit agreement by others. Academic department heads, in particular, should be able to specify the procedures they follow in evaluating teaching effectiveness.

The validation of evaluation procedures is a building-in of accurate and verifiable observations, assessments, and inferences through a process of systematic development. The validity of many techniques or procedures may be institutionally- or departmentally-specific in the sense that they serve well the purposes of a particular college or academic department but do easily lend themselves to use in other settings. As desirable as external validity may be as a characteristic of faculty evaluation methods, internal validity may be more easily obtained and more important.

Fairness in faculty evaluation is a requirement now demanded by public policy. Disciplinary differences make fairness a difficult matter for many institutions and will often intensify administrative liabilities for evaluation decisions. But like validity, fairness must be built into the process and must be a function of the rationale developed as well as the systematic and objective methods devised.

HOW SHOULD THE RESULTS BE USED?

There are good reasons to believe that the effectiveness of faculty evaluation is directly related to its acceptance by the faculty who are being evaluated. The acceptability of evaluation is dependent, in turn, upon the uses that will be made of evaluation results. It should be obvious, therefore,

that the uses of faculty evaluation should be specified in advance as a function of the rationale developed and the climate or atmosphere created.

It is not redundant to say that all uses of faculty evaluation should be intellectually honest. The development of rationales and methods should be open and participatory; no aspect of the developmental process is more important than faculty initiative and cooperation. Once obtained, the results of faculty evaluation should be used for only such purposes as earlier specified and agreed upon. All administrative uses of faculty evaluation, in particular, should be based on faculty participation in the developmental process and on faculty concurrence that specific uses of the results are warranted.

Many faculty evaluation systems have been dishonest in the sense that no explicit tie was made to the institution's incentive-and-reward system. Too many systems are internally inconsistent in the sense that faculty are appointed for the explicit purpose of teaching and then rewarded on the basis of research and publications. Where an institution's incentives and rewards are, there it should also expect the faculty's efforts to be.

The incentive-and-reward system of many institutions is still partially concealed. Salary is not the sole incentive that institutions of higher education have and for many faculty members, it has never been the most important one. Professional status and rank remain important incentives for many faculty members, and academic careers do involve perquisites and amenities for many academicians. There is much to suggest that the development of a faculty evaluation system should include an intensive analysis of the institution's incentives and rewards for faculty performance.

In other words — the uses of faculty evaluation are related in interesting ways to the ways in which evaluation procedures and methods are developed. The active participation and involvement of faculty in the development of rationale and methods are obviously essential, but the development of a faculty evaluation system under groundrules that evaluation is an explicit administrative function requires appreciable leadership on the part of administrators. The necessity of administrative leadership again points to the groundwork that must be carefully done prior to the application of specific methods and techniques.

ETHICAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The development of faculty evaluation procedures for the explicit purpose of improving instruction has ethical and legal implications that have not been fully recognized. It has not always been obvious, for example, that commitments on the part of the faculty to improve their teaching should be accompanied by commitments on the part of the institution to help them improve. Having developed an evaluation system that is systematic, objective, valid, and fair — and having evaluated the performance of teaching faculty for the agreed-upon purpose of improving instruction — what happens to faculty members with obvious defects in teaching performance?

Some administrators have apparently operated on the principle that poor instructors would eventually be weeded out by annual cycles of promotion, tenure, and salary increases. In brief, they believe in the self-elimination of the incompetent. Other administrators without faith in the deficiency-detecting capabilities of the faculty have proceeded on the premise that inadequate performance is a function of inexperience and will eventually be corrected with professional maturity.

Recent emphases on faculty development, however, are a more explicit recognition that both faculty evaluation and development are essential to the improvement of instruction. Unfortunately, faculty development has a history of focusing on the development of faculty competencies through sabbaticals, release time for research, and other opportunities for advanced study — and not on the improvement of performance in the classroom. The establishment of extra-departmental campus agencies such as faculty development centers, learning

resources centers, and offices of instructional development give much better promise of providing teaching faculty with the assistance they need.

The gist may be that institutions have an ethical obligation to assist faculty in the development of their teaching skills and they may be increasingly subject to legal obligations. As faculty members gain property rights in the conditions of their employment and as courts recognize reasonable expectations that faculty may be entitled to, it will be increasingly difficult to improve instruction by eliminating the incompetent. Institutions that evaluate teaching effectiveness may find themselves with legal directives to improve what is defective.

Other legal implications of faculty evaluation may be seen in the unwillingness of courts to recognize evaluation results as privileged information. As information is gathered to confirm evaluation decisions, it will become increasingly "discoverable" if faculty members disagree with those decisions and seek relief in courts of law. Recorded observations, noted impressions, rating scales, letters of support, memoranda of discussion and agreement, and other forms of administrative or professional opinion will become quite constricted as their confidentiality is threatened. To say the least, they will become increasingly legalistic — and they will lose much of the value for purpose of instructional improvement. The legal context in which systems or forms of faculty evaluation must be developed is both a spur and a detriment. Evaluation methods developed for purposes of legal defense will serve purposes of instructional improvement poorly.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper has attempted to raise fundamental questions concerning the purposes and functions of faculty evaluation in institutions of higher education. The contention is made that the purpose of faculty evaluation ought to be the improvement of instruction. The administrative uses of faculty evaluation for decisions of promotion, tenure, and salary increases should be secondary.

Faculty evaluation should focus on the performance of teaching faculty and not on faculty qualifications, professional experience, or competence. Teaching should be explicitly recognized as what faculty do as a means of helping students learn; it is teaching that should be evaluated and not the faculty member's scholarly reputation or productivity. The latter will always be evaluated in other ways at other times.

Further contention is made that faculty evaluation should be the responsibility of those administratively responsible for faculty performance. Evaluation by students and colleagues has severe limitations if evaluation is to serve the improvement of instruction. Student evaluation, as a general practice in education, should be carefully re-assessed with the possibility that it no longer serves the purposes it should serve.

Faculty evaluations should be conducted in a manner that is systematic, objective, valid, and fair. These are standards that all forms of evaluation in a pluralistic society should meet and the evaluation of teaching performance involves no exceptions.

The results of faculty evaluation should be used in a manner that is intellectually honest, specified in advance, and fully acceptable to the faculty who are being evaluated. In brief, the uses of evaluation should hold no surprises for those who have participated in the development of acceptable methods and procedures and who have agreed to evaluation as a means of improving instruction.

To be effective, faculty evaluation must be tied to the institution's incentive-and-reward system — as that system actually operates within the institution. It must also be supported by realistic means of faculty development and assistance in the form of instructional resources that facilitate faculty performance in the classroom. Institutions have an ethical obligation to assist faculty members whose performance is evaluated as lacking; they may be incurring a legal obligation to provide such assistance.

Efforts to evaluate faculty performance have other ethical and legal implications

that should be considered. It is doubtful whether courts of law will recognize evaluation results as privileged when litigation is entered by faculty. The loss of confidentiality and the potential necessity of defending evaluation methods and results in court suggest great difficulty in developing the kinds of faculty evaluation systems that can actually lead to improved instruction.

Given the natural reluctance of faculty to have their teaching performance evaluated, the legal/administrative/political climate under which faculty evaluation is often initiated, and the inherent difficulties of establishing an objective, valid, and fair system of faculty evaluation, many institutions should wonder if the trip is necessary. If a failure to provide adequate resources for faculty development becomes a matter of litigation, institutions should wonder further if the trip is worth the cost.

Questions of necessity and cost, however, should be secondary to the improvement of instruction at the undergraduate level. Critics and observers increasingly believe instructional improvement to be the most urgent need of the nation's 3000 institutions of higher education. Two decades of concern with innovation and reform have not produced methods of instruction that are clearly superior to those of the past, and the learning outcomes of too many undergraduate programs are still too much in doubt. As well as we have taught students in our areas of specialization, we have often failed to teach a respect for learning as such. There is indeed much that we should do to improve the way we teach.

The tragedy of education may be that too many faculty members are satisfied with the way they teach and the way students learn. If the proof of educational puddings is in their graduate and professional products, many of us are fortunate indeed. Students survive and do well with or without us, and they often make our instruction look better than it actually was. But faculty members should take no pride in the performance of their graduates when their own teaching performance is in doubt.

It is most unlikely that faculty evaluation has run its course. No great expectations are in order, however, if that course continues to lack a proper concern for the improvement of instruction and if faculty members continue to teach the way they were taught. Teaching performance should indeed be evaluated – and the outcome ought to be better teaching.

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